

BIDDULPH TOWN COUNCIL



COUNCILLORS HANDBOOK 2025/26

AIM OF THE HANDBOOK

There are over 80,000 local councillors in England, who provide a bridge between the community and their council.

The aim of this handbook is to ensure any new councillors have an overview of their new role, and as a reminder for the not so new. It summarises your duties and responsibilities as a Biddulph Town Councillor, and informs you how and where to find relevant documents and information, etc.

It should be considered alongside the Council's:

- Standing Orders – written rules: <https://biddulph.co.uk/meetings-2/>
- Financial Regulations - written rules to regulate and control financial affairs and accounting procedures: <https://biddulph.co.uk/our-policies/>
- Code of Conduct for Members, including the Nolan Principles - the fundamental aim of the Code is to create and maintain public confidence in the role of councillor and local government. The Nolan Principles are also called 'The Seven Principles of Public Life':
<https://biddulph.co.uk/our-policies/>
- Neighbourhood Plan and Neighbourhood Development Order:
<https://biddulph.co.uk/neighbourhood-plan/>
<https://biddulph.co.uk/neighbourhood-development-order/>
- Scheme of Delegation – Terms of Reference:
<https://biddulph.co.uk/committee-structure/>
- General Power of Competence: <https://www.biddulph.co.uk/general-power-of-competence/>
- Budget: <https://biddulph.co.uk/annual-return-annual-report-and-budget/>
- Policies – Human Resource and Council: <https://biddulph.co.uk/our-policies/>

- Schedule of Meetings, including Committee Membership: <https://biddulph.co.uk/meetings-2/>
- Publication Scheme for the Freedom of Information Act: <https://biddulph.co.uk/transparency/>

And:

- NALC's Good Councillors Guide
- Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association Training Information
- Map of the Five Wards of Biddulph: <https://biddulph.co.uk/your-councillors/>
- The Data Protection (GDPR) and Retention Policy: <https://biddulph.co.uk/transparency/>

The content in this handbook will evolve over time – please provide feedback on where it can be improved.

In many cases you'll see that we're simply signposting you to where the relevant information can already be found, which helps us to ensure the information we provide is always kept up-to-date.

Whilst this handbook is not comprehensive on all matters, it will hopefully prove to be a useful source of general information during your term of office.

Mrs Sarah Haydon
Chief Officer

April 2025

CONTENTS

Aim of the Handbook

1 INTRODUCTION

2 BIDDULPH TOWN COUNCIL

2.1 The Council as a Whole

2.2 Councillors Duties and Responsibilities

2.3 Officers Duties and Responsibilities

2.4 The Council's Website – Your Town Council Pages

2.5 The Council's Website - Town Council Projects

2.6 The Council's Website - Town Council Events

2.7 The Council's Website - Community Information

2.8 The Council's Website – Services

3. ADVICE FOR NEW COUNCILLORS

4. COUNCILLOR INDUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

5. MEETINGS

5.1 The Mayor's Role in the Chairing of Meetings

5.2 General Principles

5.3 Two Annual Meetings?

5.4 Preparing for a Meeting

5.5 During a Meeting

5.6 After a Meeting

6. TOWN COUNCIL GRANTS SCHEMES

7. SOCIAL MEDIA – KEY CONSIDERATIONS

8. SECURITY

9. USEFUL CONTACTS

10. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

1 INTRODUCTION

Biddulph Town Council, based within the Town Hall, is the first tier in Staffordshire's three tier system of local government – County, District and Town/Parish Councils operate in the Staffordshire Moorlands.

Civic town/parish councils were formed in England under the reforming Local Government Act 1894 to take over local oversight of civic duties. Biddulph Town Council formed in 1974 following the Local Government Act 1972.

There is no legal difference between a Parish and a Town Council; they both have the same powers and functions; the only difference is in the name and the fact that the Chairman of a Town Council may be referred to as the Town Mayor.

You are one of 22 Town Councillors for a large Town Council; based on population size (19,892 at the 2011 Census and the precept - £481,920.00 in 2025/26, which is money raised via the Council Tax, collected by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council). Other sources of income include rental from buildings, allotment sites, interment and memorial fees.

The activities of town and parish councils fall into three main categories:

1. representing the local community,
2. delivering services to meet local needs, and
3. improving quality of life and community wellbeing.

Local councils can provide and maintain a variety of local services including allotments, bridleways, burial grounds, bus shelters, car parks, commons and open spaces, community transport schemes, community safety and crime reduction measures, events and festivals, footpaths, leisure and sports facilities, litter bins, public toilets, planning, street cleaning and lighting, tourism activities, traffic calming measures, village greens and youth projects. These existing powers were strengthened by the 2011 Localism Act, including the extension of the 'General Power of Competence' to eligible local councils. Biddulph has adopted the General Power of Competence.

2 BIDDULPH TOWN COUNCIL

Biddulph Town Council is responsible for the management of the Town Hall, Biddulph Grange Visitor Centre, the 'Bus Hub', including public toilets, burial grounds, allotments, tourism, community events, grant assistance to local groups, etc. Although the smallest of the councils operating in the town, it has a varied workload, impacting the lives of those living in the town.

2.1 THE COUNCIL AS A WHOLE

A council:

- must do what the law requires it to do.
- may do only what the law says it may do.
- cannot do anything unless permitted by legislation.

The council is a corporate body with a legal existence of its own. It has powers expressly conferred upon it by statute and must act within these powers. It must also act in a reasonable manner and in accordance with the 'Nolan Principles'.

The role of the council is one of representation, consultation and the delivery of services. Within this role the council:

- is accountable to the electorate.
- convenes the minimum number of meetings required by law – which is four, one of which must be the Annual Meeting of the Council.
- makes decisions.
- sets and monitors budgets, precepts, risk assessment policies and standing orders.
- maintains and preserves all assets belonging to the council.
- ensures compliance with Acts of Parliament.
- complies with its obligations under the General Data Protection Regulations and employment law.
- considers the impact of its decisions on reducing crime and order in the district.
- has regard to the protection of biodiversity.

Biddulph Town Council has a duty to ensure all the rules for the administration of the council are followed. The council must:

- appoint a Chair of the council, which is the Mayor.
- appoint Officers, as appropriate for carrying out its functions.

- appoint a Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) to manage the council's financial affairs – the Council's Chief Officer is the RFO.
- appoint an independent and competent internal auditor.
- adopt a Code of Conduct.

These rules are set out in law to guide the procedures of the council, each council can add its own regulations. Together these rules make up Standing Orders, as formally agreed by the council.

There may appear to be too many rules, but remember that they protect people's rights, our electorate, Councillors and Officers and give confidence that our council is properly run.

The crucial question is – does the council have a legal power to act? A council must always ask this question when making a decision, especially if it involves public money.

The diversity of local councils is their strength. Each can make a unique response to the needs of their community with a sensitivity that is more difficult for principal authorities to achieve. Councillors have different backgrounds, enthusiasms and interests and different skills and attitudes.

Biddulph Town Councillors need a range of skills to work as a team, to play a vital part in representing the interests of our community, improving the quality of life and the local environment. The Council influences other decision makers and can deliver services to meet local needs. It makes a difference.

2.2 COUNCILLORS DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Councillors and Officers play complementary roles to ensure the council devises appropriate policies, which are carried out. It's important individual roles are clearly understood.

The best councils have Officers and Councillors who work together as a team to provide a service for the community.

Town Councillors are champions of the community and give residents a voice on the decisions a Town Council makes.

A Town Councillors Duties and Responsibilities:

- you are member of the council and must observe the council's Code of Conduct.
- you have a duty to attend, take part and vote in meetings of the council. The notice to attend a council meeting is, in law, a summons, because you have a duty to attend. You must consider all the relevant facts and issues on matters which require a decision, including the views of others expressed at any meeting and must respect decisions made by the majority of those present and voting.
- you should consider, in advance of any meeting, the agenda and any related documents sent to you, with the summons.
- you must ensure, with other Councillors, that the council is properly managed.
- you must avoid taking actions which are unlawful, financially improper or likely to amount to maladministration.
- you should pro-actively develop strategies and plans for the area.
- you should serve our community and help to resolve problems, respond to queries and investigate concerns. Please exercise caution if undertaking practical tasks within the community. The Chief Officer can advise what activities the Town Council's insurance policy will cover. For example, you are unlikely to be covered for cutting down trees and shrubs using chainsaws in a public place.
- you should represent our community by raising concerns, representing the whole electorate, and not just those who voted for you.
- you must work collaboratively with others, knowing and working with representatives of local organisations, interest groups and businesses.
- you must make and review decisions on which services and projects the Town Council should take forward.

- you should engage with residents, local groups and businesses about their needs and represent their views at council meetings and subsequently communicate council decisions.
- you should undertake appropriate training and development in order to carry out your role effectively.

You are not authorised to initiate or certify financial transactions, or to enter into a contract on behalf of the Council. The Local Government Act 1972 – s101 only permits decisions to be made by the Council, a committee or an Officer.

Councillors are elected by, and Officers are servants of, the public and Councillors and Officers are indispensable to one another. Mutual respect between Councillors and Officers is essential to good local government. However, their responsibilities are distinct.

It is not the role of Councillors to involve themselves in the day-to-day management of the Council's services. You are not authorised to instruct Officers other than:

- through the formal decision-making process.
- where staff have been specifically allocated to give support to a member or group of members.

If in doubt, please speak to the Chief Officer.

2.3 OFFICERS DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A council's paid employees are called Officers. Unlike civil servants, who work for the government, local government Officers have a duty to support the whole council. This means they must remain politically neutral.

Councillors set the strategic direction and agree the policy framework of the council. Officers are responsible for delivering the council's policies and for the day-to-day operation of the organisation.

The Chief Officer (Inc Town Clerk Responsibilities) – Sarah Haydon

The Chief Officer is the council's Chief Executive and is employed by the council and answers to the council as a whole. Other staff, though employed by the council, are managed by the Chief Officer. It is the Chief Officer that should be approached if you, as a Councillor, have any concerns over staffing or an individual staff member.

The Chief Officer has the prime responsibility for the administration of the Council and for carrying out the Council's decisions, making sure the Council conducts its business properly, providing independent, objective and professional advice and support. The Chief Officer may have to act as a project manager, personnel director, public relations officer or finance administrator, basically the Chief Officer is at the centre of things.

Sarah is CILCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration) qualified, a Fellow of the Society of Local Council Clerks and a member of the Institute of Place Management and the Chartered Institute of Housing.

The Chief Officer is not a secretary and is not at the beck and call of the Mayor or other councillors; the Chief Officer is answerable only to the council as a whole.

The Chief Officer is the proper officer of the council in law and is responsible for carrying out any lawful actions as instructed by a properly convened meeting of the council.

Together with the Mayor, the Chief Officer is the face of officialdom in the community. The Chief Officer is often called the Second Citizen in view of the advisory and ceremonial role played alongside the First Citizen (Mayor/Chair).

The Chief Officer is also the Registrar for the Burial Ground.

The Chief Officers Duties and Responsibilities:

- guide and advise the council on matters of law and procedure and implement agreed policy to ensure the Council conducts its business lawfully, setting a budget justifying the request for precept and submitting the precept request to District Council.
- advise the council, and Councillors, on governance, ethical and procedural matters, ensuring the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations are correctly observed and implemented.
- ensure notices, agendas and minutes are prepared and distributed, as directed by the Council, our Standing Orders and the law.
- ensure the resources and documentation of the council are maintained.
- ensure financial accounts and records are maintained and year end accounts are prepared, and that the Council's year end statement is signed by all parties and submitted to our external auditor.
- organise and manage the provision of Council services, supplying Councillors with regular budgetary control statements.
- ensure appropriate risk assessment policy is adopted by the Council and regularly monitored, be responsible for all aspects of Health and Safety and ensure insurance is organised.
- organise and oversee the implementation of approved projects.
- act as a point of contact for electors.
- manage and lead any other person employed by the Council, overseeing the recruitment process, ensuring pay, tax and national insurance is correctly paid and providing training, support and development.
- keep up-to-date by training/qualification.

The Chief Officer has an annual appraisal with the Mayor and the Chair of the Finance, Strategy and Management Committee. Targets are agreed based on Action Plan objectives.

As a Councillor, you should be aware that your role may impact upon the nature of your relationship with Officers. Officers expect:

- a working partnership.
- an understanding of and support for respective roles, workloads and pressures.
- respect, dignity and courtesy.

- integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality.
- to not be subject to bullying or to be put under undue pressure.
- you, as a Councillor, will not use your position or relationship to advance any personal interests or those of others, or to influence decisions improperly.
- you, as a Councillor, to all times comply with the Council's Code of Conduct.

An Officers Duties and Responsibilities:

- develop a working partnership with Councillors, treating all with respect, dignity and courtesy.
- have an understanding of and support for respective roles, workloads and pressures.
- give a timely response to enquiries, answering telephone calls and signposting customers effectively, dealing with a wide range of enquiries.
- offer professional advice, not influenced by political view or preference.
- provide regular, up-to-date information on matters that can reasonably be considered appropriate and relevant to the needs of Councillors.
- have an awareness of and sensitivity to the political environment.
- undertake appropriate training and development in order to carry out their role effectively.
- work with integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality.
- have an expectation to not have personal issues raised outside agreed procedures.
- have an understanding that they will not use their relationship with Councillors to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly.
- agree at all times to comply with the Employee Code of Conduct.

Events & Partnerships Officer – Jodie Hancock

Responsible for organising a range of activities and events to promote Biddulph and engage with the community, such as the Market, Classic Vehicle Show, Dementia Friendly Cinema, Christmas Lights 'Switch On', etc.

Jodie works to improve the town's offer and promote its services and facilities to increase footfall and encourage tourism, co-ordinating the content of the Council's website and social networking sites.

Finance Officer – Elizabeth Davies

Lizzie undertakes financial administration, maintaining the council's accounts; responsible for payments, bank reconciliation and invoicing, providing regular financial management information to the Chief Officer and Town Council. She is also responsible for administering the council's grant schemes and updating and monitoring the council's asset register.

Administration Officer – Angela Williams

Ange is responsible for burial and allotment administration, attending burials and updating burial records, inspecting the burial ground and allotment sites. She assists with office duties and provides support across council services, compiling and recording planning applications and assisting with the preparation of agendas and minutes for council committee meetings.

Compliance and Governance Officer – Margaret Warman

Reviews a range of compliance and regulatory issues to provide assurance processes are followed in accordance with legislative requirements and documented policies and procedures and to test controls operate effectively to ensure the Town Council responds appropriately.

Customer Support Assistant – Susan Booth

Welcome visitors to the Town Hall across the full range of council activity and support a range of ad-hoc projects.

Kelsey Williamson – Customer Support Apprentice

Kelsey is part of the reception team welcoming visitors to the Town Hall across the full range of council activity and supports a range of ad-hoc projects. She is learning and developing her knowledge and skills; completing tests and assignments demonstrating her understanding, supported by an external training provider.

Caretaking Team – Mark Edwards, Matthew Hall, David Mellor and Ken Chaddock

Responsible for ensuring the Town Hall, Visitor Centre and 'Bus Hub' are maintained and run to a high standard, undertaking routine cleaning, setting up rooms for hire and completing maintenance and compliance duties, such as

alarm and equipment checking, to ensure our buildings are safe and well looked after.

Informal and collaborative two-way contact between Councillors and Officers is encouraged. But personal familiarity can damage the relationship. To protect both Councillors and Officers, Officers should address Councillors as Councillor Surname and Mr/Madam Mayor in the public arena, except where circumstances clearly indicate that a level of informality is appropriate. If the Mayor identifies as gender-neutral then their address is simply Mayor, as it's a gender-neutral term. The same principle applies for Councillors addressing Officers.

When Councillors and Officers work together as a team, they combine knowledge and skills to deliver real benefits to the community they serve. Good working relationships, mutual respect and an understanding of their different roles are vital. Any conflict between them, especially during meetings in front of the press or public can damage the council.

2.4 THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE – YOUR TOWN COUNCIL PAGES

You have access to agendas, minutes, policies, etc under the 'Your Town Council' heading on the Council's website, as listed below:

- Agendas
- Annual Return, Annual Report and Budget
- Committee Structure (including Terms of Reference and Scheme of Delegation)
- Councillor Duties and the Democratic Process
- General Power of Competence
- Mayor of Biddulph
- Meetings
- Meet the Team
- Minutes
- Our Policies
- Strategic Planning (5 Year Plan 2024-2029)
- Transparency (including General Privacy Notices, Publication Scheme and Guidance, Data Protection (GDPR) and Retention Policy, Public Participation in Council Meetings, Expenditure Exceeding £500, Staff Structure, Procurement Information, Local Council Land and Assets)

- Vacancies and Tenders
- Your Councillors

2.5 TOWN COUNCIL PROJECTS

Whilst not an exhaustive list of the projects the Council is working on, there are web pages under the 'Town Council Projects' heading on the Council's website giving more information, as listed below:

- Biddulph Shop Photographs
- Biddulph Works Together
- Dementia Care
- Heritage Restoration
- Knypersley Highways
- Love Your High Street
- Mental Health Training
- Miner's Lamps
- Mining Wheel Memorial Wall
- Neighbourhood Development Order
- Neighbourhood Plan
- Station Road Mosaic Bench
- 'The Hideaway' Café
- Tree Planting

These pages are updated and change frequently, as new projects are onboarded and projects progress.

2.6 DISCOVER BIDDULPH

There are web pages under the 'Discover Biddulph' heading on the Council's website giving more information, as listed below:

- Biddulph in Bloom
- Biddulph Map
- Cycling in Biddulph
- Explore Biddulph
- Footpaths and Bridleways
- Getting Here
- Local History
- Parks in Biddulph
- Town War Memorials

- Victoria Mine
- Village Signs
- Where to Park

2.7 TOWN COUNCIL EVENTS

Information about regular events is posted to the Council's website pages, as listed below:

- What's On
- Local News
- Local Publications
- Biddulph Festival
- Biddulph Town Hall Programme of Events
- Biddulph Volunteer Recognition and Civic Awards
- Chinese Lunar New Year 2025
- Christmas in Biddulph
- Classic Vehicle Show
- Dementia Friendly Cinema
- Health and Wellbeing
- Markets in Biddulph
- Police 'Drop-In' Sessions
- Remembrance Sunday
- Tea with the Town Council

Again, these pages are updated and change frequently, as new events are planned, and regular events move forward another year.

2.8 COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Information about our community is posted to the Council's website pages, as listed below:

- Biddulph Directory
- Biddulph Town Crier
- Clubs, Groups & Societies
- Defibrillator Locations

- Fairtrade
- Heritage Grants
- Honorary Freeman of Biddulph
- Online Town Guide
- On Our Streets
- Our Environment
- Stopping Loan Sharks
- Twin Town – Fusignano
- Volunteering Opportunities

2.9 SERVICES

Information about services Biddulph Town Council provides is posted to the Council's website pages, as listed below:

- QUALITY GOLD ACHIEVEMENT
- SILVER RoSPA AWARD
- 93 Bus Service
- Allotments
- Biddulph Town Hall Reception
- Burials and Memorials
- Community Help Point
- Fishing at Biddulph Grange Country Park
- Grant Awards Schemes
- Markets
- Office Space Hire
- Public Toilets
- Reducing Your Energy Costs
- Room Hire

Again, these pages are updated and change frequently, as we pro-actively provide information.

Please try to use these web pages to find information before phoning Town Council Officers and using their resource as a search facility.

3 ADVICE FOR NEW COUNCILLORS

You might think after an exhausting election day, the count and the euphoria of being elected that you could have a rest, but the experience of other newly elected councillors is that this just doesn't happen.

The first few weeks are very confusing, and you will be given lots of information which eventually will begin to make sense – here's some advice to help you through the first few weeks.

Ask For Help

You may be completely new, but there is always someone who has been there before you and can give you a hand. Don't hesitate to ask your fellow councillors and council officers, who have an encyclopaedic knowledge of what has happened in the past and can help and support you.

Get Organised

Carry a notepad with you to write down names, addresses, phone numbers and some detail of problems/issues and questions. Having a notebook means you have everything in one place.

Don't Make Promises You Can't Keep

Don't promise to sort things out until you've got all the information. People approach new councillors about old problems they haven't been able to get sorted and expect you to do something. The best policy is to listen, write it all down and then discuss it with your colleagues.

Tell Your Employer

If you're in paid employment you have a legal right to 'reasonable time off' to undertake your duties as a councillor. Your right is for unpaid time off, but some large employers pay for time off for public duties.

Don't Expect to Understand

You will be deluged with paperwork and lots of information. Remember that no one can take it all in at once – it will take time.

Don't Expect to Be Popular

The best you can do is tell people why things are as they are, raise questions where there is no satisfactory answer, get information and trust your own judgement.

4 COUNCILLOR INDUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Immediately following election, you will be invited to a detailed 'Councillor Induction Event', covering Standing Orders, etc and the 'Good Councillors Guide' – a NALC publication. There is a link to this document on the Council's website page 'Councillor Duties & The Democratic Process':

<https://biddulph.co.uk/councillor-duties-the-democratic-process/>

You will receive regular invites to Staffordshire Parish Councils Association topic-specific development/training sessions on a range of relevant subject areas linked to the varying roles and responsibilities Councillors undertake. All training is free.

Councillors have completed training such as 'Code of Conduct', Planning – Making Effective Representations', 'Surviving the End of Year Audit'.

Councillors are encouraged to participate in training specific to their role and the needs of the Council.

Please email the office to advise of any training you complete, so the Council's training log can be updated.

Councillors approved the implementation of a 'Councillor's Skills Audit' at their Emergency Planning meeting 13 May 2021 to record their skills, knowledge and experience – to be included on the business continuity and emergency plan. It's beneficial in identifying Councillor's training needs and opportunities for development. You will be asked to provide this information too.

5 MEETINGS

Congratulations on being elected as a Biddulph Town Councillor. We hope you have a very happy and successful four-year term of office.

Before acting as a Councillor, you must:

1. fill in and sign the formal **'Declaration of Acceptance of Office'**. It must be signed at or before the first council meeting following election in the presence of the Chief Officer. Failure to sign means you cannot continue as a councillor, unless given specific permission to sign later. The declaration states that you'll duly and faithfully fulfil the duties of office according to the best of your judgement and ability, as well as observe Biddulph Town Council's Code of Conduct.
2. fill in and sign the **'Notification by Member of a Local Authority of Pecuniary and Other Interests' Form** (this is also required by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council). The public must have confidence that Councillors are making decisions in their best interests and not their own. Therefore, if a Councillor has an interest, they must declare it. An interest is any form of business or asset that could be perceived to influence a Councillor's decision. Your completed and signed 'Register of Interests Form' will be published to the Council's public website. If business or assets change, then a new form must be completed.
3. fill in and sign **'Councillor Contact Details'**. An Elected Member is a public official and therefore the Council has a duty to publish contact information and any interests you, as a Councillor, may have. These details will be available on the council's public website. We will also require a brief 'profile wording' and a recent photograph for the website.

Important Documents – in advance of the Annual Meeting of the Town Council (Mayor-Making) you will receive reviewed documents for approval:

- Standing Orders
- Financial Regulations
- Councillor Code of Conduct

These documents are reviewed annually and adopted as part of the Town Council's constitution. These are core documents for your work as a Town Councillor.

5.1 THE MAYOR'S ROLE IN THE CHAIRING OF MEETINGS

The Mayor is in charge during council meetings; this is an office created by legislation demanding respect. The Mayor presides over the full meeting of the Town Council so that its business can be carried out efficiently and with regard to the rights of Councillors and the interest of the community.

The Mayor should be addressed as Mr or Madam Mayor. If the Mayor identifies as gender-neutral then their address is simply Mayor, as it's a gender-neutral term.

Attendees should rise at the Mayor's entrance and again on their departure and should stand when speaking in council meetings.

The Mayor, as Chair, has a duty to ensure council meetings run smoothly, that all business is properly considered and all Councillors who wish to speak can do so. It is the Chair's responsibility to ensure the proper conduct of meetings and to exercise a second or casting vote in the event of a tie in votes on any question to be decided at meetings; for other matters they have the same rights as other Councillors.

The Chair is required, by common law, to ensure that the business considered at a meeting is lawful and that the conduct and/or order of the meeting is proper. A Chair's authority in respect of the conduct and procedure of meetings is detailed in the Council's Standing Orders.

Individual Councillors and the public present at the meeting are expected to respect and ultimately obey a Chair's ruling.

If the Mayor is not present at a Council meeting, the Deputy Mayor must preside if present. The Deputy Mayor has no standing in that role when the Mayor is present but assumes the precedence and standing of the Mayor when deputising for the Mayor.

5.2 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Meetings have a clear purpose – to make decisions – and are not just talking shops. They are public events, the meetings must be advertised, and the press and public have a right to observe, record and report on how the council operates.

All meetings of the Town Council and its committees are open to the public. There is a 20-minute section for public participation at the start of the Town Council meeting, with five minutes allocated to each speaker.

The same approach should be adopted for sub-committees. Exceptions are when sensitive issues are discussed (such as legal, contractual or staffing matters) and the council can agree to exclude the press and public for just that item of business as set out in the Council's Standing Orders.

The Council decides on a schedule of meetings for each year. This is published to the Council's website: Biddulph Town Council/Your Town Council/Meetings <https://biddulph.co.uk/meetings-2/>

Council meetings are meetings of the full council, and all Councillors are expected to attend.

Committee meetings bring together a smaller number of Councillors to concentrate on a specific function of the Council and share the workload.

Committees can be:

- permanent (standing) committees.
- sub-committees – appointed by a committee to focus discussion on a specific topic among a smaller group of Councillors.
- working party groups – set up for a short-term purpose. These are not subject to the strict rules that apply to formal council meetings and do not need to be held in public. A working party can not make a decision on behalf of the council, but explores options, presenting to the council for a decision.

Discussion between colleagues should take place to determine which of the committees you wish to serve on:

- Finance Strategy and Management
- Recreation and Amenities

- Town and Community
- Planning

Sometimes non-councillors are invited to join committees or sub-committees and working parties (with a few exceptions, they can not vote). It is an excellent way to involve others in council work.

At the beginning of 2025-26 the following Working Groups exist:

- Neighbourhood Plan Implementation (Planning Committee)
- Young People (Town and Community Committee)
- Transport (Recreation and Amenities Committee)
- Biddulph Works Together (Town and Community Committee)
- Events (Town and Community Committee)
- Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution (Town Council)
- Woodhouse Burial Ground- Garden of Remembrance (Recreation and Amenities Committee)

Meeting dates will be agreed by the members of each Working Group.

Membership of Committees and outside bodies is approved at the Annual Meeting of the Town Council.

5.3 TWO ANNUAL MEETINGS?

If you're a Councillor elected in May, your first meeting will be the Annual Meeting of the Town Council – marking the start of the year. This is where the Constitution (a series of important documents) is agreed, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are elected and committee members and representatives to other bodies are appointed.

Agenda items for this meeting are centred around setting individual roles, committee memberships and future Full Council meeting dates - it is an important meeting to set out the year ahead.

The outgoing Mayor opens and chairs the meeting until handing over to the newly elected Mayor.

The Annual Town Meeting, (usually in May), which all the citizens of Biddulph are invited, is not a council meeting – it is to enable the Council to report on

the year. Electors can contribute to the agenda and in practice these meetings often celebrate local activities and debate current issues in the community.

The Mayor, any two councillors or any six electors can call the Annual Town Meeting. The Mayor, if present, chairs the meeting.

A new format was introduced in 2021 to make the Annual Town Meeting as interactive as possible, ensuring the community can be involved. A series of question and answer sessions with organisations working within the town was posted to the Council's Facebook account. Sessions were held throughout the day with representatives from Biddulph Local Peoples Group, Biddulph Youth & Community Zone, Biddulph Library and Biddulph Police.

This format provide successful, and we plan for it to be replicated going forward.

5.4 PREPARING FOR A MEETING

Your first meeting, as a Councillor, can be daunting. As a new member, you'll wonder what will happen and where to sit. Hopefully other Councillors will be welcoming. Officers will be in attendance to offer guidance.

At least three clear days before each council, committee or sub-committee meeting you'll receive a summons and agenda. The three clear days is established in law because it's important to be given due notice of the issues to be discussed. It does not include the day on which the agenda is sent out, or the day of the meeting. It also excludes Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays.

Items cannot be added to an agenda after the deadline has passed, they must wait for another meeting.

Each agenda item should make it very clear what you, as a Councillor, are expected to do and be precise about the subject under discussion. Putting the agenda together is the responsibility of the Chief Officer, usually in consultation with the relevant Chair.

As a Councillor, you can ask the Chief Officer to add items to an agenda, your request must be in writing, letter or email.

These five W's help you prepare for a meeting:

- What is the meeting for?
- What part should I play?
- What papers must I read?
- Which people do I need to consult?
- What did I promise to do before this meeting?

We recognise Councillors may be unable to work completely 'paper-free', however, we encourage you to work 'paper-less' where possible. Therefore, all Councillors receive meeting papers electronically, rather than in hard copy, but they may elect to collect hard copies from the Town Hall.

5.5 DURING A MEETING

As a Councillor, you have a duty to attend, but sometimes things crop up and you're unable to. You must contact the Chief Officer with an apology and explanation.

If you fail to attend any meetings for six months without approved absence, you will automatically cease to be a Councillor. The Chief Officer will seek an explanation in advance of this action and will provide a number of 'warnings'.

You must sign an attendance register on entering the meeting room, for Health and Safety reasons, to ensure the meeting is quorate and as proof of your attendance. If the register is not signed, there is no record of your attendance. It is not the role of Officers to record who was there.

When you speak as a Councillor at full Council you must stand and address the meeting through the Chair/Mayor. Other members must remain seated whilst a member is speaking.

Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. If more than one person wants to speak, the Chair directs the order of speaking.

You should:

- keep contributions short and to the point.
- always work through the Chair.
- never engage in personal attacks on others.
- try to avoid making a similar point again.

The meeting must remain quorate at all times; if you will need to leave before the end of a council meeting, always inform the Chief Officer beforehand.

As a rule, in Standing Orders, meetings should not last more than two and a half hours, otherwise concentration begins to lapse. A well-crafted agenda with precise items for discussion is a valuable tool to help the Chair bring any meeting to a close on time.

5.6 AFTER A MEETING

Decisions will have been made and need to be implemented. The minutes of the meeting will be written up, circulated and published to the Council's website, as a legal record of what was decided.

It's important the minutes are accurate, which is why the minutes of the last meeting are confirmed and signed at the start of the next meeting.

Minutes should clearly record the actions to be taken; they cement agreements and clarify confusions. They will not record all discussions, but key points that led to a decision.

6 TOWN COUNCIL GRANTS SCHEMES

Each year Biddulph Town Council allocates grant funding to support charities and community groups directly benefiting Biddulph residents, including significant sums for both Citizens Advice and Biddulph in Bloom. The Council supports approximately 20 organisations in the town each year. Here's a link to the Council's Grants Policy: <https://www.biddulph.co.uk/grant-awards-schemes/>

The Council's current priorities for funding are:

- Young people (aged 13-19).
- Carers.
- Opportunities to provide food and personal items to those experiencing poverty.
- People at risk of loneliness and isolation.
- Opportunities providing educational experiences.
- Provision to improve social welfare and community cohesion.
- New initiatives established to bridge a gap in current service provision within the town.
- Environmental initiatives.

Applications are welcome for grants between £30 and £2,000. They may be submitted at any time, those received by May are considered for grant allocation in June the following year. Larger amounts are only considered in

exceptional circumstances. Only one application should be submitted per organisation.

Town Councillor's Community Grants Fund

Applications should be submitted between August and January each year. Grants awarded are up to £250 per Town Councillor, although a number of Councillors may combine their allocations to create a larger award.

A 'Grant Application Form' is available on the Council's website, or from the Town Hall.

Applications are scrutinised to ensure grants are used appropriately and funds contribute to a sustainable group or activity.

7 SOCIAL MEDIA – KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The Council's 'Social Media, Press and Public Communication Policy' is published to the Council's website: <https://biddulph.co.uk/our-policies/>. This links to the Code of Conduct for Members and the Nolan Principles contained within.

The following key considerations guide the policy on social media:

- Councillors represent the Town Council and must not bring the Town Council or other Councillors into disrepute.
- It's perfectly reasonable for Councillors to have their own personal social media account. However, in the public realm, people may struggle to identify where Councillors are posting their own personal thoughts or whether officially acting as a representative of the Council. Even where it's made clear that a post is personal and does not relate to Council, posts that are offensive, rude or libellous may not only damage personal reputation but be damaging to the Council by association also.
- Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or committee meeting may constitute pre-disposition, predetermination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.

- At Town Council level, it is not unusual for Councillors and Officers to have pre-existing friendships on social media and face to face, and the matter must be considered carefully to allow personal friendships to continue without the potential for actual or the appearance of bias.

Requests from the press or other media for an oral or written comment or statement from the Council, its councillors or staff should be handled in accordance with the Council's policy in respect of dealing with the press and/or other media. The Chief Officer is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue Press Statements on behalf of the Council.

Under no circumstances should you mention the names of Officers, either at the Town Council or other Councils, in your discussions on social media.

8 SECURITY

All visitors to the Town Hall, including Councillors, should report to the reception desk on arrival, this is to ensure the safety of all on the premises.

Outside of reception opening hours the front doors will be unlocked by our caretaking staff.

An attendance register must be completed at all meetings.

9 USEFUL CONTACTS

BIDDULPH TOWN COUNCIL

You can contact the team on:

Phone: 01782 498480

Email: office@biddulph-tc.gov.uk

The office is usually staffed from 9am until 5pm. If there is no answer by phone, please leave a message, as Officers may be in a meeting/away from their desk.

If you want to talk about any issues or seek advice, please arrange a suitable time. The team do not offer a drop-in provision. To ensure availability, please call in advance.

Don't be offended if the team don't accept Facebook friend requests, and please don't contact Officers via personal Facebook pages or on personal mobile numbers (if you have them). We work long and anti-social hours, but we are protective of our private family time.

Biddulph Town Council is not responsible for council tax, household waste collection, benefits, etc. You cannot pay your council tax at Biddulph Town Hall, nor can you speak to the Police – the station is not staffed.

It can be frustrating when contacting 'The Council' to get the response 'We don't deal with that you will have to contact ...' However, it usually best for all concerned to be put in direct contact with the correct department/person, rather than act as an intermediary.

You'll find information within Biddulph's Town Guide and on Biddulph Town Council's website. If you cannot find what you are looking for, please let us know as it may be a useful addition to the information available.

DISTRICT COUNCIL – STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS

Responsible for planning, housing, council tax, refuse collection, electoral registration, licensing, etc.. The main office is in Stockwell Street, Leek.

Switchboard/General	0345 605 3010
Payment Line	0345 605 3016
Council Tax/Business Rates revenues@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk	0345 605 3011
Benefits benefits@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk	0345 605 3012
Planning planning@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk	0345 605 3013
Environmental	0345 605 3014
Elections	0345 605 3015

Councillors can use the District's 'Report It' public web page, to report a wide variety of matters, such as littering, dog fouling, abandoned vehicles, etc.

Here's a link to their page: https://www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/Report_It

COUNTY COUNCIL – STAFFORDSHIRE

Responsible for major county wide services such as education, highways, police, fire and rescue, social services and libraries. The main office is in Stafford.

Switchboard/General	0300 111 8000
Disabled Parking (Blue Badges)	0300 111 8000
Registrar	0300 111 8001
Highways	www.staffordshire.gov.uk/reportit

Councillors may use the County's Highways public web page, to report a wide variety of matters.

POLICE

The nearest staffed police stations are at Market Street, Congleton, Brunswick Street, Macclesfield and Sutherland Road, Longton.

In the event of an emergency – phone **999**.

To report a crime or incident such as a stolen item, property damage, antisocial behaviour, etc phone **101**, fill in and submit an online form. Here's a link to Staffordshire Police's website:

<https://www.staffordshire.police.uk/>

'Police Drop-in' sessions take place in Biddulph Town Hall Foyer on the 2nd Tuesday of each month – 2pm to 3.30pm.

10 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Action Plan	Translates council strategy and decisions into actions.
Agenda	A list of matters, either in electronic or hard copy form, to be discussed at a meeting.
Budget	An estimate of income and expenditure for a set period of time.
Chair	The gender-neutral role description for the person in charge of a meeting.
Code of Conduct	Defines the desired behaviour expected of a councillor.
Constituents	A person who can vote in a particular area of the country.
Constitution	A written legal document that guides the council on its decision-making processes. The legal framework for the constitution is agreed by central government.
Electorate	All the people who are allowed to vote.
Electoral Ward	One of the areas into which a Council area is divided, having its own elected political representative(s) for each ward for the purposes of an election.
Financial Regulations	Written rules to regulate and control financial affairs and accounting procedures.
Full Council	Meeting open to every councillor. Council decisions are voted on and policy and budgeting matters considered, as well as policies determined which set out the framework for how the council carries out its functions.
Meeting Minutes	Notes documented during a meeting to provide an accurate record of what transpired, highlighting the key issues discussed, actions proposed or voted on and activities to be undertaken.

Neighbourhood Development Order	A tool that allows the granting of planning permission for specified types of development without the need to submit plans to the District Council.
Neighbourhood Plan	A document that sets out planning policies for a local area, highlighting areas to protect and how development should meet the needs of the community.
Officer	Employee of Biddulph Town Council.
Policies	Rules and regulations that govern how the Council carries out its duties and powers, available for the public to view on the Council's website.
Precept	The local council's share of council tax. The precept request goes to the billing authority (the district council) which collects the tax.
Quorum	The minimum number of councillors required to be present at a meeting to meet statutory requirements.
Scheme of Delegation	A document showing what authority the council has delegated to committees and Officers under the powers of its constitution.
Standing Orders	Written rules that say how an organisation should organise its formal meetings.
Summons	The Agenda papers are sent to the Councillor by way of an invitation requesting that they attend the meeting.
The Nolan Principles	Also called 'The Seven Principles of Public Life': standards expected with regard to Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership.